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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EFIN](#) [IR](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: POLOFF INTRODUCTORY MEETINGS HIGHLIGHT
COOPERATION, SHORTCOMINGS

Classified By: CDA D. Brent Hardt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Recent meetings with key St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) government and non-government representatives yielded leads on SVG's orientation towards the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) Shipboarding Agreement, reaction on G/TIP's Tier 2 Watchlist designation, and offered a preview on near-term political developments. Although St. Vincent's perspectives on some issues continue to diverge from U.S. priorities, working-level engagement appears collaborative. Government and non-government actors alike appreciated U.S. engagement in St. Vincent, and welcomed further cooperation. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Poloff met July 20-21 with Foreign Minister (FM) Louis Straker, Minister of Tourism Glen Beache, National Security Permanent Secretary (PermSec) Godfred Pompey, and former Prime Minister (PM) Sir James Mitchell. Outside government, Poloff met with Ken Boyea, an influential business leader related to PM Ralph Gonsalves; civil society activist and entrepreneur Marlon Mills; head of the Marion House non-governmental organization (NGO) for at-risk women, Barbara Matthews; Nicole Sylvester, head of the SVG Human Rights Association; and visited the Liberty Lodge shelter for at-risk boys.

PSI: A Way Forward

¶3. (C) Poloff confirmed separately with FM Straker and PermSec Pompey that the draft PSI Shipboarding Agreement had been forwarded to Attorney General Judith Jones-Morgan for review. FM Straker admitted to being negligent about following-up with the AG, and vowed to rectify this. Subsequently, Pompey said that the AG's review was complete and PM Gonsalves had already given his preliminary approval. The next step, according to Pompey, was to gather all key stakeholders in Washington. He said that arrangements for a Washington meeting were underway. Post had previously approached the MFA about meetings concerning PSI in May this year, but Straker and the MFA seemed only vaguely aware of the details of the meetings.

TIP: A Blind-siding Eye-opener

¶4. (C) The normally reserved FM did not hesitate to show his disappointment with the Embassy, and the USG writ large, for not being consulted and prepared before G/TIP made public its Tier 2 Watchlist classification. Still wanting to see the facts surrounding G/TIP's decision, FM Straker welcomed the upcoming visit by G/TIP's selected adviser -- confirming to Poloff that all necessary measures would be taken to resolve and bring the matter to a close. He noted that the subject

received widespread coverage in the press, following the Prime Minister's strong reaction in parliament, leaving many in public and private circles scratching their heads. (Comment: The FM's claim seemed realistic, given that nearly everyone Poloff encountered during the two-day trip wanted to know more about "St. Vincent's problem with trafficking." End Comment).

15. (C) Although also surprised by the watchlist designation, both Marion House's Barbara Matthews and Liberty Lodge Director Michael Akers told Poloff separately that the matter would likely force the government to take a look at passing specific counter-trafficking legislation and assess its enforcement efforts. Each said they looked forward to the G/TIP adviser's recommendations, and were willing to provide advice and assistance, as needed.

Airport, Government on Shaky Ground

16. (C) All non-government interlocutors confirmed unanimously to Poloff that the largely Venezuelan-funded international airport project would soon fail. Citing factors ranging from unstable topsoil and likely equipment erosion caused by the continuous waft of windward sea air, to the likelihood that a post-Chavez Venezuela would pull the plug on funding. The project was deemed nothing more than a "feel good" political experiment that PM Gonsalves would regret. This view was not shared, however, by the FM and PermSec Pompey, as each touted the airport's potential benefit as a transportation hub for regional airline LIAT and a destination for major international carriers. Interestingly, Minister of Tourism

Beache did not share his colleagues' enthusiasm, pitching instead the idea that diversification of the regional airline market would pay bigger dividends.

17. (C) Former PM Mitchell and civil society activist Marlon Mills, both close to but not allied with SVG's main opposition party, separately called PM Gonsalves' political orientation "dangerous," and expressed concern that St. Vincent's future as an independent, democratic state was in jeopardy. Each accused Gonsalves of spending beyond the country's means, borrowing more than could ever be repaid, and involving himself with criminal elements linked to the recent Millennium Bank scandal. Similarly, Mitchell and Mills lambasted opposition parties generally, claiming that their leaders have done little to critique constructively the PM's actions. Mitchell said opposition groups need to do more to make their positions known, so voters can have a better foundation on which to base their decisions come election time. Mitchell did not believe early elections would be called, speculating that the risk would be too high for Gonsalves. He feared that the election would be bought with Venezuelan funds, "again." Conversely, Mills was confident that an election would occur before PM Gonsalves' term ends in 2011. Both highlighted the importance of keeping track of SVG's ongoing constitutional reform process, agreeing that its outcome could determine how quickly elections would take place -- especially if the final draft affords additional powers to the PM.

Comment: Sustaining Engagement

18. (C) As seen with PSI, TIP, and other bilateral issues, USG-SVG engagement remains cooperative. Civil society and opposition groups are open to USG cooperation, and welcome the possibility of USG-based international institutions to take part in observing SVG's political developments; most notably, its constitutional reform process. End Comment.

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